

Archival Description: How do we do it?

Nine years ago, in the town of Tortosa, at the *VIII Jornades d'Arxivística de Catalunya* (8th Archive Conference of Catalonia), we had a chance to exchange points of view and thoughts on one of the techniques that best defines our profession: archival description. At the time, although we were awaiting innovations in information and communication technologies, and were wondering whether the new channels of dissemination and access to information would revolutionise working techniques in archiving or whether they would bring about a change of attitude among users to demand greater agility and efficiency in access to holdings.

There have been many changes since then, and other trends have become stronger; version two of the ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description has become consolidated as a general guide, which proposes the description of archival documents at any stage in their life cycle, although it is mostly concerned with standardising the description of documents for permanent conservation. In this respect, what it does is to promote the drawing up of the Archival Description Standard of Catalonia (*Norma de Descripció Arxivística de Catalunya* – NODAC).

The NODAC was born with the aim of establishing archival description standards for the archives of Catalonia, in order to facilitate and standardise description processes. Thus, it is considered as an instrument for developing the ISAD(G) standard to make it compatible with existing description standards and adapt it to the context of Catalan archives. Since 2006, it has been the standard applied in most Catalan archives and has been the model for many organisations within and without Catalonia.

The Encoded Archival Description (EAD) has also been consolidated as a standardisation tool in the presentation of archival descriptions on the Internet. The reason for the EAD lies in the need to use and exploit the opportunities for the online exchange of archival descriptions on an international scale and aid the interpretation of the information by users. Other developments in recent years include ISO 23081 Metadata for Records and MoReq2, in which metadata description is a priority. This reinforces the idea that the description of electronic records requires a special effort, considering aspects such as authenticity, integrity, availability, conservation, and so on.

In this context of consolidation of technical standards, archivists are still responsible for the proper organisation of holdings using homogeneous, systematic, and standardised description methods, based on the simplest, most understandable language possible for all users.

With this objective in mind, the IAAC has organised the *IX Jornada d'Estudi i Debat* (9th Symposium of Study and Debate) to take place on 26 May of this year with the title *La descripció arxivística: com ho fem?* (Archival Description: How do we do it?), which will raise some of the challenges currently facing the profession. Where should we direct our efforts to standardise description? How deeply must we delve into the description of archival holdings? Do the services

and resources provided by ICTs affect the description systems used up to now? Do Internet and search engines such as Google question the traditional description model? Should we change any of the strategies to bring description closer to user habits? How do we approach description in the various stages of the life cycle and for different types of document?

The guest speakers at this symposium will present proposals being carried out to respond to the questions raised in four areas: archival description today, the EAD information exchange model, the application of the NODAC and future policies, and finally, archival description of metadata.

To conclude the symposium, there will be a presentation of some experiences of the effect of Web 2.0 on archives.

This symposium of study and debate represents a commitment to reflection aimed at favouring the establishment of standardisation policies. At the AAC we believe that these policies provide a thread for adopting flexible methods that enable smooth communication between documents and users, and advancing towards the standardisation of archival description.

Shortly you will receive information on the *IX Jornada d'Estudi i Debat* (9th Symposium of Study and Debate) and a postal registration slip.